

Mobility Matters

TRANSPORTATION ISSUES IN THE NJTPA REGION

Commuter Profiles

Getting Where We Need to Go

This issue of Mobility Matters gives an overview of commuting in the NJTPA region, with information about the length of commutes, mode of transportation, congestion and other issues relevant to commuting. At the heart of the story of commuting in the region, though, are the people who drive, walk, bike and ride to work each day. The stories of the diverse group of people profiled in this issue convey what it is like to travel to and from work each day in northern and central New Jersey far better than any numbers can.

Each weekday morning, hundreds of thousands of northern and central New Jersey residents commute. For most, the journey involves a few steps to a car and a drive of anywhere from a few minutes to well over an hour or more. Others walk or drive a short distance to a train station or find their way to a park-and-ride or a bus stop. Still others take to the water, riding on ferries bound for Manhattan piers. And a few hop onto bicycles and ride to work. For many, the commute involves a combination of these modes of trans-

portation. For others, like the truckers who transport goods, navigating the transportation network — in rush hour and beyond — is part of their job itself.

All these travelers are headed to a variety of destinations. Manhattan remains the high-powered engine that drives the regional economy, but jobs have become more and more dispersed over the last 25 years or so as New Jersey's own economy has grown with the addition of major office complexes, industrial parks and commercial centers.

This change has led to more complex commuting



from Newark Evening News, March 2, 1969

Cont'd on page 10

Enjoying Some Distance Between Work and Home

Ask many northern and central New Jersey commuters if they'd like to be closer to their jobs and have a shorter commute,

and you'd expect to hear a resounding "yes" more often than not. However, that's not the case with Tanda Tucker, an art teacher at the Wardlaw

Hartridge School in Edison, whose commute takes her through three different counties.

Tucker, 35, commutes alone in her car from the townhouse she owns in Bernardsville, Somerset County, and actually prefers to have a little distance between work and home. "I don't run into students or parents in the grocery store, and when I'm done with work, I can be done with work," she says.

Tucker's typical morning commute begins at 7:20 a.m. She takes back roads through Basking Ridge where she picks up I-78 eastbound, staying on the highway for one exit before traveling through Union County, on her way to campus in Edison, Middlesex County.

Tucker says her 30- to 45-

minute commute is about 16 miles door-to-door, and like many regional commuters, she often changes her route and takes local roads to get around congestion or accidents. "In the morning I always listen to the news before I leave to get the traffic report, and if I find out there's an accident or something wrong on 78, I'll just avoid it."

Her return time from work varies, thanks to after-school activities or other duties. Nevertheless, she still often winds up in the middle of the rush home. "I can leave at 4 o'clock or 6 o'clock and I always end up hitting more congestion," says Tucker. That means a 45-minute trip home, unless she leaves right when school gets out or stays much later for activities.



Tucker is one of the many regional commuters who does not have a reasonable mass transit option. "I could take the train to Summit, and then from Summit to Newark Penn Station, then switch trains and go down to MetroPark and take a cab to school. But that's just not sensible, and it would take so much longer."

Even with Tucker's relatively simple and routine commute, there are difficult days. She describes one morning when she was ahead of time until she came upon a road construction project in Plainfield that closed her normal route. "What I thought was so frustrating was that there was no

detour sign set up; it was ridiculous." She tried to follow other cars looking for a detour but ended up getting way off course and lost.

Other than typical congestion through the center of Plainfield and occasionally getting stuck behind a large truck from the quarry in Basking Ridge, Tucker says there aren't too many things she dislikes about her commute.

On the flip side, Tucker points to a couple of things she actually likes about her commute. "I definitely like the fact that I can listen to music or talk on my hands-free cell phone and catch up on calls," she says. "My job is not that far

away, and it's a pleasant drive because I'm primarily taking back roads, and I'm not just driving on a freeway exit after exit."

Even in her non-work related travels, she applies her time-tested strategy of opting for local roads to avoid traffic wherever possible. "I'm always thinking when I'm driving and planning my moves ahead as to what is going to be the quickest way to get there," she says, adding that she has lived and traveled in many parts of north Jersey. "If there's a problem, I know if I can wind my way to a main drag someplace I can get out of trouble." ●

Jazz and Drama on the Parkway

Like many commuters in northern New Jersey, Jocelyn Charles knows that the easiest trip between two points isn't always the shortest one, in terms of either time or distance.

Charles, an executive team leader at a retailer in Clifton, leaves her home in Irvington, Essex County, around 5:45 a.m. and typically arrives at work about 45 minutes later. She takes the Garden State Parkway

and Route 3 to Clifton Commons Mall.

She employs two strategies to arrive at work on time and to avoid traffic congestion when driving home. She leaves home a half hour early to



THE NJTPA

The NJTPA is the federally authorized Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the six million people in the 13-county northern New Jersey region. Each year, the NJTPA oversees over \$2 billion in transportation investments. The NJTPA evaluates and approves proposed transportation improvement projects and provides a forum for interagency cooperation and public input into funding decisions. It also sponsors and conducts studies, assists county planning agencies and monitors compliance with national air quality goals. The NJTPA serves the fourth most populous MPO region in the country. The NJTPA Board consists of one elected official from each of the region's 13 counties and two largest cities, Newark and Jersey City. The Board also includes a Governor's Representative, the Commissioner of the NJ Department of Transportation, the Executive Directors of NJ Transit and the Port Authority of NY & NJ and a Citizens' Representative appointed by the Governor. NJTPA Board meetings are held bi-monthly and are open to the public.

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allow for any unexpected traffic delays. Going home, she sometimes takes Route 21 to Newark, then Springfield Avenue to Irvington. It's a longer route, but there is less congestion.

The commute has its upside. What she likes best about the trip is the time it gives her to herself — a chance to think. On a good commuting day, she listens to jazz while driving

and enjoys a sense of relaxation and “finding herself.” Charles noted that the roads are usually in good shape and the portion of the parkway she uses was recently repaved and the toll booths removed.

Her worst commuting experience came during a snow storm. While she was on her way home during the February 2006 storm, traffic was diverted from the parkway near Montclair State University. She was unfamiliar with the area, got lost and received poor directions from police. Her cell phone battery was dead and everything was closed. She drove around in circles for hours in the driving snow.

Charles had left her job at 10:30 p.m. and got home at 3 a.m. She was frustrated that she was near a familiar route home but didn't know it.

Another time, on her way to work, there was a shooting on the parkway, resulting in a flipped vehicle near Exit 143 in Irvington. Traffic was held up by police activity, and she just had to wait. When she was finally forced to exit the parkway, she had to find a way to get to work in unfamiliar territory.

Charles said she would not change her mode of transportation to work and noted that bus transit is too inconvenient from her present residence.

She said she would be willing to move to Clifton to improve her commute. She would walk or take the bus to work.

Charles doesn't think there's much that could be done to improve conditions on her route to work. It is very direct and there is room on the highways in case of car trouble. Her ride along Route 3 to Clifton Commons is very direct.

Charles jokes that what she likes least about her commute is the fact that she is going to work. ●

One Step Ahead: From Ironbound to Work in Ten Minutes

Getting to work in the morning is anything but an ordeal for Adam Zipkin. He never fights traffic. He faces no unexpected delays, and can't recall ever running into a problem on the way to the office. Neither accidents nor traffic jams have been a problem or even an inconvenience.

Zipkin, 39, an attorney in private practice in downtown Newark, commutes by foot and subway from the nearby Ironbound district. Heading out at around 8:15 a.m. each day, he walks the six or so blocks to Ferry Street, continues on to Penn Station and catches the City Subway, riding it to Military Park, one stop down the line. From there, it's a mere half-block to Academy Street. At 8:30 a.m. — all of 15 minutes after departing the house — he walks through the doors of his office.

Zipkin says he almost always walks and takes the

subway, though he will drive if he needs to use the car later in the day to go to court, attend a meeting or travel somewhere else. And why hop the subway at all? It's simply “easier,” and the stop at Penn Station gives Zipkin a chance to pick up a newspaper.

Living in Newark makes it easy to meet other transportation needs as well. Newark Liberty Airport is ten minutes away by car. With Penn Station so close, though, it's convenient to take a NJ Transit train to catch an outgoing flight or meet incoming friends. It also eliminates the need to find and pay for parking. Travel by public transit to New York City and other destinations is relatively quick and painless as well.

Zipkin knows his situation is not the norm, with its access to this level of transportation convenience. He's also found his commute is far more reliable than others. Asked to recount his worst commuting day, he

can't come up with one. “On this route? I really haven't had bad commutes.”

Although Zipkin now uses his own car to get to meetings and court dates in Union, Somerset, Middlesex, Bergen, and Morris counties, that wasn't always the case. In the past, he walked to nearby meetings and rode along with colleagues to outlying areas.

“When I first moved here, for two years I didn't have a car at all. And I was fine. It's not hard to get around Newark without a car.”

Of course, some trips are more difficult than others, Zipkin says. The city's one subway line doesn't provide good access to the South Ward or Central Ward, but NJ Transit is “doing the one thing they could do.” That is, building a new subway branch between Newark Penn and Newark Broad Street stations which is scheduled to start service on July 17th. ●



Commuting in Reverse is the Way to Go



Commuting 20 miles by car through the densest part of northern New Jersey during rush hour can be an early morning or late afternoon headache. But not necessarily — especially when you can go against the flow. Just ask Michael Wright, a 35-year-old biochemist, who lives

in downtown Jersey City and commutes each morning to the pharmaceutical company Merck in Rahway. Wright says it takes about 35 minutes to cover the route each morning. His conclusion? “It’s really not bad.”

For this urban-to-suburban “reverse commute,” Wright normally takes Route 1&9, which is heavily congested in the “in-bound” direction

toward Jersey City and New York City. Each morning, he sees this congestion on the Pulaski Skyway just outside of Jersey City.

“That thing is backed up by 8:30,” he says. “Meanwhile my commute is pretty clear in the opposite direction.”

While driving is mainly a breeze most mornings — except for some congestion at lights in the Elizabeth and Linden area — he still occasionally takes the train, particularly when weather is bad or he wants to go to his gym in Manhattan immediately after work. On those mornings, he walks to the PATH station, where he catches a train to Newark Penn Station. There, he transfers to an NJ Transit train headed to Rahway. A company-sponsored shuttle bus service takes him from the Rahway station to his workplace. One summer he even tried roller-blading instead of using the shuttle bus.

But the penalty in time for using rail, Wright says, can be substantial. His 35-minute commute becomes an hour or an hour and a half, depending on the connections. To get to

work around 9 a.m., he has to leave his house at 7 a.m. compared to 8:30 a.m. when traveling by car. While he likes the ability to read on the train, he says the car “is quick. And I have more versatility . . . After work I can hit Shoprite, Home Depot or run an errand — do it all in one shot.”

His commute will be disrupted in coming months. A major construction project on the aging portion of Route 1&9 leading to the Holland Tunnel has already required lane closures and caused traffic tie-ups. He fears “traffic is going to be much worse.” Fortunately, for the cost of a toll, he can avoid it all by taking the parallel New Jersey Turnpike. He’ll even save several minutes in time. Being a commuter that doesn’t follow the crowds has its advantages. ●

Train Friends Offer Upside to Daily Commute

Ask Iris Falcon whether she likes her commute to and from New York City and she’s quick with an answer. “You know what?” she says. “After doing it for 13 years, I can’t stand doing it anymore.” However, she knows that driving into the city is not a reasonable alternative, and the bus isn’t much of a better option for her. “I tried the bus service, and I get car sick.”

Each weekday morning, Falcon leaves her home in South Plainfield at 7:30 a.m. and drives to the Plainfield train station. From there, she takes NJ Transit’s Raritan Valley line to Newark Penn Station, where she catches the PATH to lower Manhattan, before finally walking to her job as an Accounts Payable Manager at GFI Management Services on

Broadway. The trip takes about an hour and a half from door-to-door.

Falcon says that she has considered working closer to home in New Jersey, but that it would mean making less money. “The New Jersey-based companies are not paying what I’m worth with the amount of experience I have,” she explains. “All in all, I’ve resigned myself to the fact that I’ll be taking the train to and from work every day until I can retire.”

The commute is not without its upside. Falcon says she has met a lot of people on the train over the years. “I sit with the same group of people every morning and then there’s a small group that I sit with on the way home,” Falcon says. “We know each others’ families

now. We see each other every day; we go out together; we go to each others houses and everything; and we know each others’ children. It’s like a little social gathering.”

On the downside, Falcon relates a checklist of things that irritate her about her commute. “Sometimes the trains are overcrowded and people don’t want to move and let you sit next to them,” she says. “They put their bags on the seat. Or sometimes you have very rude conductors. Some of those conductors have no people skills whatsoever.” Loud cell phone talkers are another irritation.

In addition, Falcon typically dreads the PATH trains from Newark to Manhattan. “The PATH is a nightmare,” she says. “There are definitely not enough seats, people are very rude, men knock women over



to get a seat.” Falcon says she’s sometimes able to snag a PATH seat by keeping a careful watch on the indicators that show where a car’s doors will open. “Then you’ve got to stand right there where the door is going to open, and you jump on real fast, and then you get a seat.”

Although Falcon’s commute is mostly routine, some days

are more unusual. She recalls a day where the train stopped at Westfield because a trespasser on the tracks had been struck near Newark. “They didn’t know how long we were going to be sitting and waiting, so half of us filed out of the train and took the bus in . . . and that’s how I found out I got car sick.”

But Falcon says her worst

commuting experience by far was on September 11, 2001. “It was a horrible experience,” she said. Falcon, who was in lower Manhattan that fateful day, was able to get safely home after walking more than two dozen blocks from Greenwich Village to Penn Station to catch a NJ Transit train.

From a regional perspective, Falcon says she would like to

see train overcrowding problems addressed to improve her commute. “I think we need more trains,” she says. “I don’t know if that’s possible coming from the Raritan Valley because you don’t want trains right on top of each other. But I think there could be some type of adjusted time schedule. Express trains are great, but there are not enough.” ●

Done Every Other Day, Long Commute is Tolerable

As a private pilot, Doug Schmitt can soar above the traffic congestion that is becoming increasingly common in and around his home in Alexandria Township, Hunterdon County. Unfortunately he has no way to fly to his job in Manhattan. Instead, he faces what seems like a grueling workday: a nearly two-hour commute by car and bus; a 25-block walk; 12-plus hours of work; and, finally heading home well after dark. But Schmitt is O.K. with it. Of course, it helps that he normally only goes into work every other day, working at home on alternate days.

Schmitt, 55-years-old, is a technical director at ABC Television’s studios on Manhattan’s Upper West Side. When he does go to Manhattan, Schmitt typically begins his commute at 5:45 a.m., driving to the Clinton park-and-ride lot on Interstate 78. From there, he boards the 6:20 a.m. TransBridge express bus, which gets him to the Port Authority Bus Terminal in midtown at about 7:30 a.m. He then walks up to West 66th Street to begin his work day.

Schmitt knows he could shorten the trip by taking the subway from the bus terminal to his office, but he prefers to walk. “I like to get my 20 to 25

minutes of exercise in the morning,” he says. “It’s a good way to get your day started, and a nice way to come down at the end of the day.”

Schmitt’s work day frequently lasts until 8 or 9 p.m., or even later, depending on the demands of his job. He catches a bus back home — sometimes as late as 11:30 p.m.

The long commute is his choice. “I used to live right in Manhattan and I lived literally two blocks from our studios,” says Schmitt. “Then, I just decided I wanted to move out into the country. Nothing, as of yet, has ever made me say I’m going to sell my house and move back into the city or move closer.”

For the most part, he finds the bus reasonably priced and reliable. And it has great advantages over driving: “I can read. I can get some work done. I can daydream.” After putting in a 15 hour workday, he notes, “the last thing I want to be doing is driving an hour-and-ten-minutes behind the wheel.”

Still some days, when he cannot get to the park-and-ride lot early, he is forced to drive. The lot reaches capacity by 7:30 a.m., says Schmitt, “So, if you’re going to take a bus later than that, somebody has to drop you off and I

don’t have that option.”

Taking the train is not practical. While NJ Transit’s Raritan Valley Line does serve Annandale (near the Clinton park-and-ride), the service does not run frequently or late into the night. “At night I would be stranded because there is no service at the hours that I would be coming home,” he says.

He recommends improving transit service to the area — running more trains, extending the Raritan Valley Line further west and even creating a “transit village type of concept” to provide a central location for accessing bus and rail. The investments, he feels, are justified to address impacts of increasing development in Hunterdon County and eastern

Pennsylvania — in particular, worsening road congestion. When he moved to Alexandria Township 11 years ago, he says, Interstate 78 “was a nice ride. It was never congested. Now it’s congested at all hours of the day and night; there are wild drivers everywhere . . . accidents all the time.”

He is worried that the rural features that attracted him to Hunterdon County — and that continue to make his long commute worthwhile — are being threatened. “I think development has outpaced planning. Somewhere, there has to be a balance, and I think we also have to be real careful about what we’re doing to the environment.” ●



Trio of Trouble Spots Makes for Tough Commute



Mark Hrywna has come up with a few inventive strategies to help manage his northern New Jersey commute, but his trips to and from work remain a typically frustrating fact of life. Hrywna drives alone from the one-bedroom condominium he owns in Rahway, Union County to his job as a senior editor at *The NonProfit Times* in Morris Plains, Morris County.

On a weekend, with little commuter traffic on the roads, he could make the trip in about 30 minutes, driving local roads to the Garden State Parkway north, then to I-78 west, and then to Route 24 west out to his office at Routes 202 and 10. But, on an average weekday morning, this same trip can take Hrywna, 32, an hour or more,

depending on conditions.

Like many northern and central New Jersey residents, Hrywna is essentially committed to commuting by car. “Technically, I could take the train to work,” he says, noting that he lives within walking distance of the Rahway train station. But Hrywna says he would have to transfer trains in Secaucus. The trip would take about two hours.

Hrywna’s commute includes some of the region’s busiest highways, but he says finding less-congested alternate routes can be challenging and not usually worthwhile in terms of saving time.

Hrywna does, however, sometimes use local roads to avoid the congestion-plagued Clark Circle in Union County, which feeds traffic onto and off of the Parkway at Exit 135. “I

live about two miles from the circle and sometimes driving those two miles takes 20 minutes,” he says.

Fortunately for Hrywna and scores of other drivers, the New Jersey Turnpike Authority next spring is expected to begin a \$4 million project to reconfigure the circle, including wider exit ramps and new synchronized traffic lights. Also, a pair of connector roadways will be built, allowing drivers to enter the circle from the parkway without tying up other drivers.

Hrywna gets a little more creative at the end of the work day. “I’ll go to the gym for about an hour after work, that way I get out and there’s somewhat less traffic.” Or sometimes he goes to his parents’ house in Springfield, Union County for dinner — and then heads home later.

Hrywna faces the unenviable task of having to navigate three key trouble spots on his commute — the Clark Circle, the merge at the Parkway and I-78 and the merge from three to two lanes on Route 24 near the Short Hills Mall in Millburn, Essex County. “If I hit just one of those three spots of traffic, I’m usually fine,” explains Hrywna. “But if I hit more than one or get stuck at any one

trouble spot for too long, that results in a much longer commute.”

Hrywna is hard-pressed to come up with anything positive about his current commuting situation, but he has no problem defining the worst thing about it. “There’s no rhyme or reason to it,” he says. “You get on the parkway and you wonder why it’s so slow. One day I left for work 10 or 15 minutes early and that was eaten up completely by traffic.”

Hrywna knows that creating more mass transit options is easier said than done. “It would be great if the focus on trains wasn’t necessarily all on New York City, which I can certainly understand.

“But it would be nice to have some kind of magic train fairy that could create a train that parallels Route 287 and hooks up with three or four train lines,” he quips, adding that he knows this is not economically feasible.

As for his less-frequent non-commuting travels around the region, Hrywna says he approaches such trips like most New Jerseyans: “It’s all about the time of day. In Jersey, you know not to go at certain times of day. You already have that ingrained, I think.” ●

Water-to-Work: Banker’s Seafaring Adventures

Unlike many fellow northern and central New Jersey residents, Marc Galligan has more than one viable option for getting to work. But Galligan, who commutes from Fair Haven, Monmouth County, to midtown Manhattan, has determined that the ferry is the most efficient way to go for the main part of his trip.

Galligan drives from his

home at about 5:40 a.m. and catches the 6 a.m. ferry out of Highlands, which arrives at Pier 11 near Wall Street around 6:40 a.m. He then takes a cab to work with two or three other riders. The trip normally takes about an hour and ten minutes and puts him at his desk at Bear Sterns in midtown Manhattan shortly before 7 a.m.

Galligan says he could take NJ Transit’s North Jersey Coast

Line into the city, but he estimates it would take nearly two hours to get to his final destination at 46th Street and Madison Avenue.

On the way home, Galligan opts to walk about 20 minutes from his office to the ferry at 34th Street on the East River. He catches the 6:20 p.m. ferry, which makes one stop at Wall Street before getting him back to Highlands approximately an

hour later. Galligan knows he could tinker with his commute to shorten it, but he has reasons for sticking with his routine.

“I could shorten the trip if I took the ferry directly from Wall Street,” Galligan says, adding that he’d prefer not to pay \$18.00 for the cab ride from his office to Wall Street. “It’s hard to find a cab at that time of night, and I enjoy the walk. It’s good exercise at the



end of the day, and it kind of relaxes me.”

However, like most commuters, Galligan knows from first-hand experience that commuting isn't always relaxing. He has little trouble recalling the worst day of his current commute. It was a winter night when the ferry ran aground, resulting in a six-hour ordeal to get back home. “There was ice and snow in the harbor and the captain had a passenger on board who needed medical attention,” Galligan recalls. “The captain thought he was

navigating through the channel but, instead, he was stuck in shallow water. We watched it live on the ferry's TV.”

Remembering another especially tough ferry trip home, Galligan points to September 1991, when the same fierce nor'easter depicted in the book and movie “The Perfect Storm” literally rocked the boat. “We were halfway home when the captain announced that we wouldn't be making one stop because a dock had washed away. And the boat was taking a pounding.” He adds that the

crew issued no serious warnings prior to departing from New York.

Even the routine commute has its moments, such as waiting for the ferry in cold weather. “When there's ice and snow in the harbor and they're running late, you can stand out there waiting for 15, 20 or 25 minutes when it's 10 below zero.”

While Galligan says he has no plans to switch to a different mode of travel or move closer to his job, he does think the region could make some changes to improve commutes like his.

“They could subsidize the boat,” he says. “They subsidize the trains and highways and other forms of transportation.”

He also thinks safety and

security could be improved.

“After one incident, they check people's bags for two weeks,” he says. “Last summer when the London bombings happened, the Coast Guard was there with machine guns for a few days, and they would check your bags, but even that was cursory.” He also believes the ferry boats themselves should be more regularly checked for potential safety problems.

However, all things considered, Galligan says there are things he truly appreciates about his commute by ferry. “I like the lack of delays and the speed of the trip,” he explains. “And, on nice summer days, it's quite pleasant.” ●

Trucking Through Traffic and Happy About It (Mostly)

After driving a truck for 23 years in northern New Jersey, says Dennis Lowe, the patterns of highway congestion become second nature. “I know exactly when to put on the brakes to start slowing down,” he says. “And then you come around the bend and there it is — the traffic.”

Lowe, 44, is a driver for Halls Transportation in South Plainfield. He delivers food-stuffs — “from candies to meats, you name it” — mostly in New Jersey and New York as well as, on occasion, surrounding states.

Most days he climbs into his 24-foot “straight reefer” truck (with attached refrigerated trailer) around 5 a.m. to begin his deliveries. White Castle restaurants are one of Halls' major customers.

For the most part, he has no choice but to wait out traffic tie-ups. Trucks are barred from

using many back roads unless they are making local deliveries. Among the chronic trouble spots for him are eastbound Route 80 after exit 30 and northbound I-287 around exit 47.

While he's learned to live with the congestion for the most part, one source of annoyance is rubbernecking when accidents occur. After crawling along for 15 minutes, he says “you'll get up there and there's nothing in your lane — it's in the other lane. But I guess that's human nature.”

He also has to contend with sometimes reckless drivers around him. “It's like people think we're big trucks, we have big brakes and we stop fast,” he says. Lowe is forced to drive defensively. He keeps to the speed limit. He hasn't gotten a single ticket in all his years of driving.

To address the region's

transportation problems he suggests that widening some roads might help. But he acknowledges that “you're still going to have the volume. That's the problem — it's volume. There's so many people.” He notes that in his hometown of Edison, it sometimes takes him 20 minutes to go two miles to his son's high school, even in the middle of the afternoon.

On the job, he takes it all in stride. He even praises New

Jersey highways in terms of the repair and upkeep they receive, compared to those in New York.

For him, driving a truck gives him the freedom of not having a boss looking over his shoulder. All he has to worry about is “coming back in one piece and with the truck empty.” Despite the daily challenges posed by New Jersey roads and drivers, by that standard, he's been a great success for over two decades. ●



Beating Traffic— On Two Wheels

For Rob Roesener, getting to work is a simple matter. Commuting by bicycle every day since graduating from college, Rob covers about three-quarters of a mile in half an hour or less. The route is simple, the hazards are few, and the cost is next to nothing.

At about 8:30 a.m. every weekday, Roesener puts on his bicycle helmet, secures his pant leg with a reflective Velcro strap to keep his business suit out of the chain, and sets out from Highland Park, Middlesex County. By 9 a.m. he's at work: no sweat. Thanks to a modest pace and his relative proximity to the offices of Windels Marx Lane & Mittendorf in New Brunswick where he's an attorney specializing in real estate and redevelopment deals, Roesener arrives in crisp and alert condition. "I don't get sweaty," he says.

And weather's not a hazard, either. "I don't get wet," he says. "I'm prepared on the way to work. If it's rainy on the way home, and I'm not expecting bad weather, then I'll get wet."

Roesener's trusty steed is not designed to impress. The battered and scratched mountain bike is painted orange all over, has no identifiable logos, and a torn seat. He isn't even sure of the manufacturer. "It's probably a Giant," he says. "I keep it

intentionally looking bad to keep it from getting stolen."

It got stolen anyway. "I used to lock it to a tall sign pole with no sign at the top and they slipped it up over the top." These "opportunists," as Roesener calls them, apparently stood on the bed of a pickup truck to liberate the bike. He reported the theft — and then saw the bike locked to a rack while he took a lunchtime walk two to three weeks later. Eventually the bike was released into his custody using the Jaws of Life.

Most of the way, Roesener sticks to sidewalks and bike paths, and he has no need to seek out alternative routes. He follows Route 27 and crosses the river on the Albany Street Bridge, which has sidewalks on both sides wide enough to easily skirt the occasional pedestrian.

Biking can be exhilarating when traffic is heavy or at a standstill due to perennial construction, the occasional accident or ordinary congestion.

On the down side, occasionally people will yell at Roesener for no apparent reason. "I don't understand it," he says. "I'm generally good about keeping to the side and staying out of the way, and I let them by." Friends, though, honk and wave.

Roesener says there aren't many other downsides to bicy-

cle commuting.

"The worst is the chain falling off, which is a pain in the neck," he says. "You get grease all over your hands. You get delayed a bit. You have your momentum, and then you're fixing your bike right there. It's embarrassing." On the other hand, mechanic fees are nonexistent, and the work is performed on the spot.

Though traffic hazards are minimal, that wasn't always the case. When Roesener lived in Edison, about five miles away, his ride took him onto local roads. Some places, though, there was no shoulder, and sharing the road with autos meant staying alert and maintaining careful control of his bike. Roesener made it a rule to never swerve from the line he was tracking parallel to the side of the road. Like any experienced biker, Roesener easily monitored traffic by listening for cars approaching from the rear, and then checking back visually if necessary.

Negotiating such tight spots is the real key to safe and effective bicycling. On his current route, the on- and off-ramps for Route 18 are the only concerns — and relatively minor ones at that. Roesener waits a bit for a clear gap and then sails through the intersection. Often, though, traffic is backed up, and he can zip right between cars without waiting.



For other trips, additional transportation options are close at hand. The Rutgers bus stops nearby, and NJ Transit's New Brunswick train station is across the street from his office, making local amenities and the wider region easily accessible. For vacations, visits to friends, or other longer trips not tied to transit routes, Roesener and his wife will take their car, but they try to limit its use.

Roesener notes that improvements for bikers would be easy and cheap. Painting bike lanes onto roadways where they fit is simple but effective. Erecting "Share the Road" signs also works. Both improvements, he points out, would help educate the general public that bikes belong in New Jersey. ●

Best Workplaces for Commuters

Best Workplaces for Commuters (BWC) is a national program and brand that provides recognition and distinction to employers that offer excellent commuter benefits to their employees.

Employers whose commuter benefits reach the National Standard of Excellence qualify for the BWC

designation and are granted rights to use the BWC logo.

To qualify, companies offer benefits such as employer-paid tax-free transit or van pool passes, telecommuting, parking cash-out, shuttles to and from transit stations, membership in an employer-based commuter program and compressed work schedules. For more information, see: www.state.nj.us/transportation/commuter/bwc ●

Location: Developer Opts for Quiet, Comfort, Convenience

Leonard Morgan, a real estate developer residing in Montclair, Essex County, has deftly applied the well-known principle of “location, location, location” to maximize his own mobility throughout the metropolitan region.

A New York City transplant, Morgan’s current residence is in an apartment building that he is renovating at the foot of the hill on Bloomfield Avenue—mere footsteps from the Bay Street Station on NJ Transit’s Montclair-Boonton line. From doorstep to train platform, Morgan passes one storefront, crosses an intersection, and approaches the station in four minutes flat. The train into Manhattan takes a half an hour. At 34th Street, he boards the subway for an easy jaunt uptown to Morningside Heights, where he operates several properties.

Often working early mornings, late evenings and some weekends, Morgan also relies on the DeCamp bus line, which makes runs into the city when there is no train service. The journey by bus takes about an hour to reach his final destination.

Morgan relishes the convenience. “It’s as short as it could get,” he says of his train commute. “This is close. I couldn’t have it better.” He clearly appreciates other factors too. “The thing I like best about traveling by train to Montclair is it’s quiet coming in and it’s quiet going out . . . and it’s quick. Quick and quiet.”

Negative aspects to the commute are few. Occasional overcrowding and attitudes com-

plete a short list, but even those are very rare on the Montclair line.

On the New York subway, though, Morgan says the experience is more colorful. His interactions with fellow commuters run the full spectrum: “people needing help and getting help, people being helpful, people being not so helpful.” There are musicians and people collecting money for various causes. Morgan recounts young men skillfully performing acrobatic feats in a crowded car. Another story involved an older man hauling a huge duffel bag stuffed with tuna sandwiches, giving them away while talking to commuters about the Bible.

Morgan doesn’t need alternative transportation — and won’t consider driving. “I really don’t like driving. You don’t know when you’ll get in a traffic jam. You don’t know what’s going to happen on the highway at any time.”

His voice clearly indicates his view that automobile use is fundamentally irrational.

“They’re not obeying the speed limits. They’re not obeying the rules of the road. And I obey the rules of the road. So why be forced to ride around with them? I’d rather drive early Sunday morning.”

In addition, eliminating time spent driving presents Morgan with more time to use as he sees fit. “There are a lot of things you can do on public transportation that you can’t do while you’re driving,” he says. “You can’t read. You can’t write.” Opting for public transportation allows Morgan to reduce risk and stress — and to regain control over another chunk of his time in an increasingly crowded and noisy world.



Morgan’s access to transportation is so good, there’s little that could be done to improve it. “The joy of coming to Montclair is that the trains are never jam-packed and the people are always very quiet. And you can’t improve on that.” ●

TMA's Offer Commuting Options

Transportation Management Associations (TMAs) are county-based non-profit organizations that encourage the use of bus and rail transit as well as travel alternatives such as ridesharing, shuttle buses, van pools and subscription

buses. They also promote employer policies to reduce congestion such as flex-time and telecommuting.

Funding for TMAs in part comes from the federal Congestion

Mitigation Air Quality (CMAQ) program. The NJTPA assists TMAs in providing commuter services and oversees their work.

The TMAs in northern New Jersey are:

Morris, Sussex & Warren County area:

TransOptions

973-267-7600

www.transoptions.org

Bergen, Essex, Passaic & Union County/Meadowlands area:

Meadowlink

201-939-4242

www.meadowlink.org

Middlesex County area:

Keep Middlesex Moving

732-745-4465

www.kmm.org

Somerset County/Raritan Valley area:

Ridewise of Raritan Valley

908-704-1011

www.ridewise.org

Hunterdon County area:

Hunterdon Area Rural Transit (HART)

908-788-5553

www.hart.tma.com

Hudson County area:

Hudson County TMA

201-339-0078

www.hudsontma.org

Mercer/Ocean County area:

Greater Mercer TMA

609-452-1491

www.gmtma.org

Strategy Evaluation at the NJTPA

The NJTPA is working to find ways to improve commuting — and all travel — for residents of the region.

The agency recently initiated its latest iteration of a regional study called the Strategy Evaluation. This effort will assess how well the region's transportation meets residents' needs and will recommend specific strategies and programs to benefit particular areas.

The Strategy Evaluation is conducted periodically, and the current NJTPA long-range transportation plan — *Access & Mobility 2030* — is based on previous such evaluations of the region's needs and ways to address them.

The process takes a “place-based” approach, finding solutions that are appropriate for prevailing land uses in particular places, ranging from the urban core to exurban and rural areas.

The process first identifies transportation needs throughout the region based on a vision of future land uses that takes into account how areas are likely to develop and should be served by transportation. Data and performance measures are used to gauge accessibility (how readily people and goods can reach desired destinations) and aspects of mobility, congestion, and reliability on roads, public transit, and other

modes of travel. This search for the most effective and affordable transportation investments requires an emphasis on land use, economic, environmental, and social impacts.

The NJTPA also will work closely with other agencies, interest groups and the general public to ensure that the needs and proposed strategies address real regional priorities. These strategies will vary from place to place. For example, expanding bus service in a burgeoning urban economic center likely makes sense, while spending scarce transportation funds on a road expansion that may fuel sprawl development in an environmentally sensitive area may not.

The Strategy Evaluation will gener-

ate several products. A map showing many of the transportation improvements needed in the next 25 years — such as new bus and rail initiatives, roadway restructuring, intermodal freight infrastructure, and intelligent technology for keeping travelers informed — will help illustrate how these projects and transportation options work together. In addition, a set of priorities with more detailed proposals will be developed for specific critical locations. Finally, the study results will serve as a foundation for the next update of the NJTPA's Regional Transportation Plan in 2009. In these ways, the Strategy Evaluation works to address individual travel while promoting wise regional development. ●

Continued from page 1

patterns, with travelers forming a web of travel that stretches over the entire region, joining workers with jobs in distant towns and creating commutation routes that stretch across county borders. While trips to the urban core of the greater metropolitan region still dominate rush-hour travel in northern and central New Jersey, commuting in the region is in fact more dispersed than ever. Map 1 (page 11) gives some idea of the myriad journeys that residents of the region take as they go to and from work each day.

This combination of more people and more jobs dispersed widely across the landscape of northern and central New Jersey puts a great deal of stress on the region's extensive yet aging transportation network, from congested roads to crowded rail cars. The challenges of navigating that system in turn put stress on the region's residents as they travel to and from work each day.

Where We Live, Where We Work

Since 1980, the number of workers who live in the region has increased by 18 percent, from less than 2.5 million to more than 2.9 million. In 1980, 61 percent of those people lived and worked in the same

county. By 2000, that percentage had dropped to 53 percent (Map 2). In other words, hundreds of thousands more people now leave their home counties to work, traveling farther than in the past and putting ever greater demands on the transportation system. At the same time, a greater percentage of residents work in Manhattan and the rest of New York City now than in 1980, likely because of the economic booms experienced in the city in the last two and a half decades. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that New York City is the commuting destination of a relatively small proportion of the region's workforce. Approximately 8 percent of residents work in New York City (7 percent work in Manhattan).

How We Get There

The vast majority of commuters in the region — 74 percent — drive to work alone. Eleven percent carpool with one or more people. Eleven percent travel by transit — commuter rail, light rail, bus or ferry. Another four percent of work trips are made on foot or by bicycle.

Many travelers use different modes of transportation to reach their jobs, such as the

commuter who drives to a train station, parks and hops on a commuter train. From the departure station, the commuter may walk, ride light rail or subway or perhaps take a company-sponsored shuttle bus to their final destination. This “multi-modal” commuting is a critical aspect of the system, and infrastructure that can help link the various modes of transportation is a high priority of the NJTPA's long-range plan and investment strategy.

Where We're Headed

Commuters in the NJTPA region use an extensive, heavily traveled system — and the volume of travel on that system is only expected to increase in the years to come on both the road and transit networks. Since 1999, vehicle miles traveled (VMT, a key measure of auto and truck use) has grown by 2 percent a year, and this trend likely will continue. VMT is projected to increase an average of about 1 percent a year until 2030 — leading to a 25 percent increase over current levels.

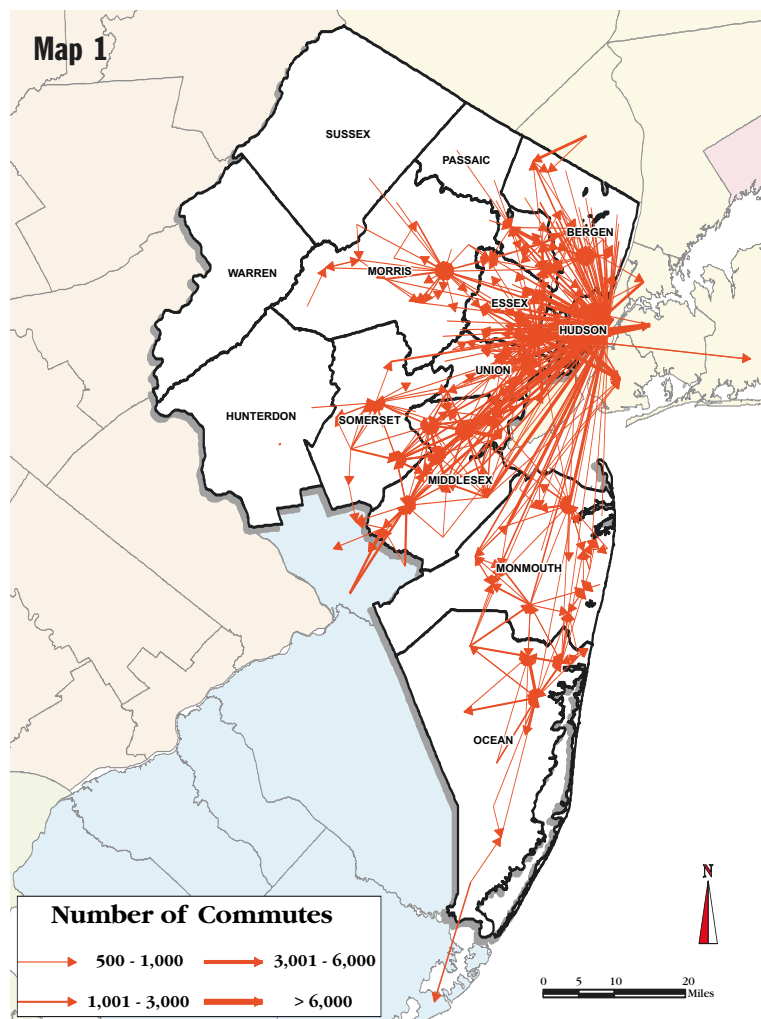
Transit ridership — on buses, rail lines and ferries — also will grow. Transit use increased rapidly during the 1990s and, despite a lag after the attacks of September 11,

2001, continues to grow. In fact, the NJTPA region has one of the highest levels of ridership in the nation. In coming decades, the transit system is expected to capture a greater share of travel, likely increasing from the current 11 percent of work commutes to at least 12 to 15 percent over the next 25 years. Enhancement and expansion of the rail and bus network will be critical to meeting growing demand for transit.

The expected increase in travel by the region's commuters — as well as the increased flow of freight in the region that will accompany the growth in population and the economy — clearly threatens mobility if measures are not taken to prepare for it. But it is important to keep in mind that a busy (and even congested) transportation network also is a sign of the region's vitality. More travel is an indicator of a thriving economy and the additional shopping, recreation and other activities that come with it.

Auto Congestion

Congestion is a fact of life in the NJTPA region, and the peak commuting hours obviously see the worst congestion. The NJTPA's travel fore-



Town-to-Town Commutes (>500 per day)

casts indicate that congestion will continue to grow steadily over the next 25 years, though at a slower pace than it did during the 1980s and 1990s.

In part, congestion is increasing because road capacity expansion cannot keep pace with the growth in vehicle travel. The region's highways are carrying increasingly dense volumes of traffic, but a variety of factors limit road expansion in the region, including federal air quality regulations, environmental issues, Smart Growth concerns and the high price right-of-way acquisition, which has made such projects prohibitively expensive. Most recently, high fuel prices have made the prospect of building more roads that much less appealing.

More fundamentally, there is a growing understanding that simply adding road capacity cannot "solve" the region's congestion problem. New capacity can encourage people to drive more ("induced demand") and can attract low-density, auto-oriented development ("sprawl"), ultimately leading

to even more congestion.

Solutions?

The NJTPA Board of Trustees has established a long-range capital investment strategy and transportation plan to address the needs of the region's travelers. As part of this effort, the NJTPA has adopted several broad investment principles to steer transportation spending, even if major capacity additions to the region's roads will be few and far between in the years to come.

The NJTPA has a firm commitment to taking a "fix it first" approach to the current transportation network while enhancing the system where possible to address problems at known "hot spots" or bottlenecks. Road improvements are made in conjunction with strategies to promote Smart Growth land use policies and alternatives to driving. Efforts to make the system work "smarter" through advanced technology are underway as well. At the same time, the NJTPA is working to expand

and enhance transit while improving freight movement and bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

The NJTPA is constantly examining and re-evaluating the region's transportation needs in terms of roads, rail lines and other facilities (see "Strategy Evaluation at the NJTPA" page 10).

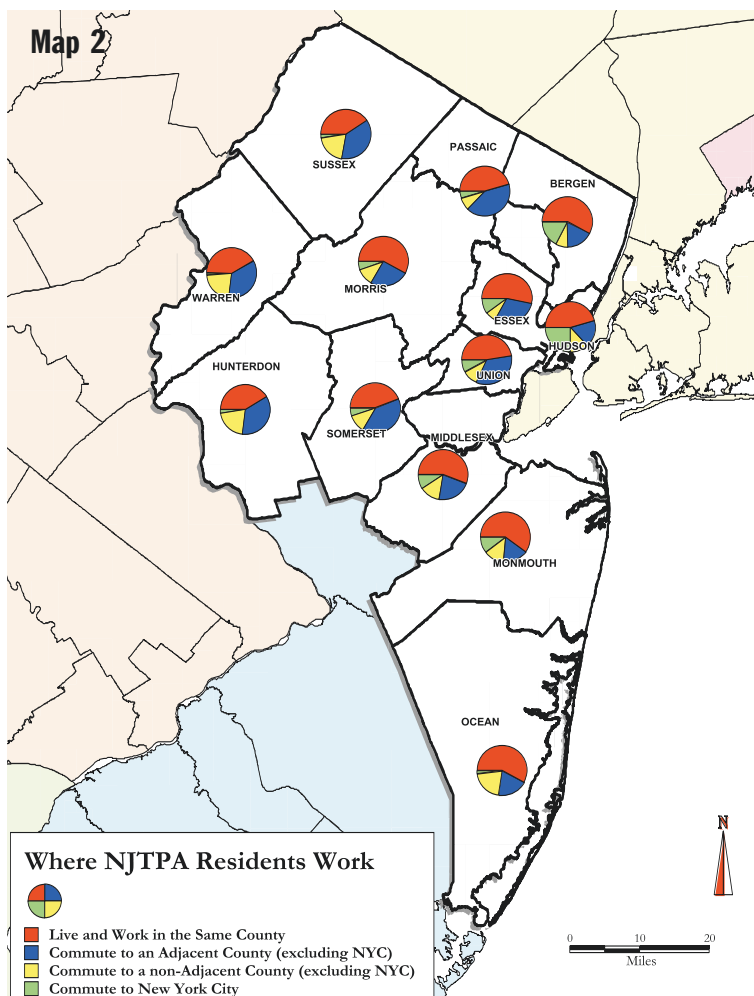
While much traffic delay is caused by sheer volume of vehicles at peak hours, accidents and other unexpected incidents also are a major source of congestion (called non-recurring delay) and a great source of frustration for travelers. The NJTPA will look to apply Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) technology such as more and better real-time information for drivers and transit riders to increase the efficiency of road networks.

Promoting transit use as an alternative to driving is particu-

larly important in reducing congestion. Currently the transit system takes hundreds of thousands of trips each day off the highway network — if it did not, congestion would be all the more crippling in many locations.

Once potential solutions are identified for a problem and studies have refined those ideas, projects are ready to become a reality. The needs of the region are vast, and each year new projects move forward as the NJTPA and its planning partners consider regional priorities in deciding how limited federal and state dollars are spent.

While enhancements and expansions of the transportation system will help address much of this growth, it is safe to assume that commuters will have interesting tales to tell in northern and central New Jersey for many years to come. ●



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photo: Dwight Hiscano



Mobility Matters



TRANSPORTATION ISSUES IN THE NJTPA REGION



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